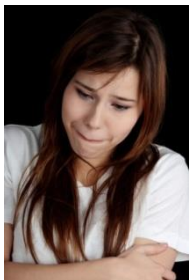


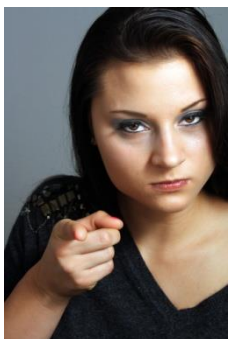
## The Aggressive Patient #3216

Violence in the workplace seems to be on the rise. In the healthcare environment, that violence is most likely to come from patients and their family members. Which ones have the potential to become aggressive or violent? Sometimes you just don't know. Increase your safety by recognizing some of the clues exhibited by people who could potentially become aggressive.



Is the patient avoiding eye contact with you? Does she have crossed arms and appear to be closed off and not wanting to interact with you? Is it because she's nervous or is it something else? Chances are, if she avoids eye contact with you and is not verbally responsive, she has the potential to lash out. To be safe, put a fellow staff member on alert and ask him/her to accompany you in the collection area. Many times having another person available in the room is enough to avert an altercation. Ask for a verbal response from the patient that she is agreeable to let you proceed with the collection. If she does not reply, do not attempt the collection. Gently dismiss her and notify the physician of the circumstances.

Does the patient have an intense stare? Is anger written all over his face? A patient who looks angry is giving you a very clear signal that there could be a problem. Don't pretend you don't notice. Bring the subject up: "Mr. Smith, you look upset today. Are you OK?" His response will give you all you need to know about how you should proceed. It is possible the patient just had a heated argument with someone, and a calm approach on your part will help him settle down. But if the patient's answer leaves you feeling uncomfortable, summon another staff member into the collection area, then ask the patient if he wants the specimen collected. If the patient is agreeable, briefly explain what he can expect during the procedure and proceed with caution. If at any time the patient demonstrates aggressive behavior, terminate the collection and calmly dismiss the patient.



Verbal threats should be taken seriously, even if the patient then follows up their statement by laughing and saying she didn't mean it. A statement such as "if you don't get this the first time I'm gonna punch you in the face" is an example of assault. Battery is the physical act. Some patients think such a threat is funny and really don't have any intention of following up on the threat. Nevertheless, such a statement should be taken very seriously. How do you know which patients will follow through with their threat and who won't? There needs to be a no-tolerance rule when it comes to threats of violence. A threat of "unwanted touching" of any kind is an assault. Healthcare facilities should have a policy in place to guide staff when threatened by a patient or visitor. Any patient who makes a threat should be immediately dismissed and the physician notified as to why the collection was not performed.

Aggression does not always come from adults. Beware of the aggressive child whose speed and strength can catch you off guard. Children also give clues as to how they may react in a stressful situation. No attempt should be made to collect blood samples from children without the assistance of at least one other adult. A child who demonstrates aggression early in the interaction may have some underlying emotional issues or has had a bad experience with phlebotomy in the past. Have adequate assistance on hand so nobody gets hurt. Sometimes it's best to postpone the draw.



### Clues the patient or family member could become physically aggressive are:

avoiding eye contact    intense stare    verbal threats, even jokingly    non-verbal to questions    standing too closely  
pressured, intense speech    rocking back and forth in chair    tightly folded arms    clenched fists    rapid pacing

**Bringing another staff member to the draw area with you can help avert aggressive behavior.**

**Aggression can also mean the patient has withdrawn consent.**

**Do not attempt to collect a blood specimen from an aggressive patient.**

***Blood Collector's ATM***  
**Abbreviated Teaching Modules**  
**for staff development, competency, and classroom**



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Test Your Knowledge

1. A patient is rapidly pacing back and forth in the waiting area with tightly folded arms, clenched fists, and a wild look in his eye. How should his body language be interpreted?
  - a) he could be extremely nervous and fearful about the impending blood collection
  - b) he may have an underlying psychiatric condition
  - c) he has the potential to become aggressive
  - d) all of the above are possibilities
2. Using the same patient example as in #1, what steps might the phlebotomist take to maintain safety for all involved?
  - a) have another staff person in the draw area
  - b) mention to the patient that he seems upset and ask him if he wants the specimen drawn
  - c) do not proceed with the specimen collection if the patient is unable to calm down
  - d) all of the above should be implemented
3. A patient comes into your draw station, never looks you in the eye, and does not converse with you except to state her name. When asked to spell her name, she loudly and forcedly spells it and as she does so, flings out her arm for the procedure, still not looking at you. What is this patient's behavior telling you?
  - a) she could potentially become aggressive during the procedure
  - b) since she put her arm out she has given permission to proceed and won't cause trouble
  - c) you should ask another staff person to join you in the room
  - d) both a and c
4. You call a patient to your draw station. As she is being seated in the phlebotomy chair she laughingly announces that you get one chance to collect the specimen, and if you miss she is going to "knock your lights out." You should:
  - a) Excuse yourself and get another staff member to join you in the room
  - b) Ask a co-worker to draw this patient instead
  - c) Calmly explain to the patient why you will not be obtaining the specimen, then dismiss her
  - d) both a and c are acceptable options, depending on circumstances and facility policy
5. Aggressive behavior can also mean the patient has withdrawn consent.
  - a) true
  - b) false

Name: _____	Date: _____
Facility/Supervisor _____	Dept: _____